

OCTOBER 12, 1978

Two signs indicate that winter is coming to the Shortgrass Country. One, the old cows are beginning to watch the pickup traffic; and two, their owners are starting to complain about the price of feed.

After the pain of last winter, I didn't spend any money summering our cattle. Upon adding up the feed bill in the spring, I was hoping that the horn flies would eat up the old sisters. We normally buy 100 or so pounds of dust to put on the ungrateful beasts. By the time a little gasoline and labor are charged to their comfort, it's by no means a small item just to make a bunch of old cows bed down earlier in the day.

Also, this is the first fall that we haven't contracted any cow cake. In the summer, we had to build a set of corrals and some new fence. Cedar posts and net-wire expense took away the feed budget. I was beginning to worry about the matter until last week when I saw a few head eating the cedar bark left at the post pile.

I keep hearing, but not seeing, that range scientists have developed cheap sources of protein like mesquite sawdust and feedlot residue. I've always envied the chicken men for having critters that'd catch a disease called cannibalism. We cow herders would be a mighty solvent bunch too, today if we could have forced our old cows to eat up the calf crops from 1973 to last year. What's hard to understand about the feather merchants is that eggs can be cheaper than the upkeep on a red ant bed and they'll be worrying about an outbreak of cannibalism. From my experience in the chicken game, the only thing that'd be healthier for a flock would be some kind of chicken exterminator that'd work faster.

I culled our cows unmercifully when we did work them. Besides the usual sorting, I even cut out the ones that I thought had bad habits. For example, one old cow kept opening the water hydrant near the pens every morning. Once I finally detected her, I put her in the trap with the culls. I wasn't going to take a chance of starting a bloodline of black cattle that'd waste water and electricity.

In the '30s an old lady over at Mertzon kept all the heifer calves from a fence for several years. Before that strain died out the town site didn't have 100 feet of garden fence left standing.

I am going to take the winter as it comes. When we run out of cedar bark, I am going to look around the barn for filler. Calves are high, it's true, but I've got a long ways to go to make up for the past five years. For once, I know better than to try to do it on sacked goods.